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Chapter 5

Qualitative Research on “Adolescence, Identity, Narration”: Programmatic and Empirical Examples

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To clarify the qualitative research approach to identity used in my study on “adolescence, identity, narration” I will present a case study. This case study will serve to explain the research methodology I employed and the specific interviewing, transcription and data analysis procedures utilized.

5.1 The study and research questions

In this study detailed problem-centered interviews with adolescents, 16 to 20 years of age, were conducted two times (with a time span between them of approximately one year). The interviews should help in analyzing how identity (Erikson, 1959) as a *feeling of the continuous sameness* and of *relative entireness* is constructed, and in which way such an experience of coherence is threatened or disturbed. This latter issue has become especially critical as a result of modernization in Western societies (Marcia, 1989; Darmstädter & Mey, 1998; Mey, 1999, chap. III; Kraus, 2000; Straub, Zielke, & Werbik, 2005).

Theoretically and methodologically I refer to the concept of “narrative identity,” because it allows one to approach issues of development empirically. Such a “narrative” perspective, used since the middle of the 1990s, also for research on identity (see Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Bamberg, 2004), helps to reveal how individuals (re)construct experiences of continuity/coherence *and* discontinuity/incoherence during the process of autobiographical self-narration.

There were three guiding questions: 1) In what ways do individual conceptions of being a child, an adolescent, and anticipating being an adult change? 2) What subject (implicit) positions (for example, actively “producing” or being passively exposed to one’s biography) do adolescents use in their narrative? 3) How do adolescents deal with discrepancies and contradictions: Is there a constant fundamental story adolescents use to present their life-stories over time?

5.2 Case study: Marion

The first interview

Marion was 19 years old when she was first interviewed. Since the divorce of her parents (when she was 15) Marion has lived with her mother, her mother’s partner, and her 13 year old sister. After leaving high school, she began a retailer traineeship in a health food store; there were no alternatives at that time and her parents and her mother’s partner forced this decision. Marion was interested in traveling and in learning foreign languages and made an earlier attempt at a traineeship in a travel agency, which failed. She also gave up on her original idea of being a biology teacher because of the vague job perspectives and the fact that her parents were not willing to pay.

In her leisure time Marion mainly stayed with scouts because she appreciated the values of tolerance and acceptance which, in her opinion, characterized the scout’s life. The scouts were also important to Marion because she met her first two lovers there. One year prior to the first interview Marion was still single.

Biographic-dynamical approach

Marion’s life as described during the first interview was characterized by a radical change. She lost the secure high school context and began to be confronted with the challenges of after-school life: “In earlier days one received pocket-money anyway [. . .] and during school one learned to be nice and (laughter) with equal rights and such things,” she said. But now life –on the other side of freedom and the campfire romantic experience with the scouts– showed its harshness and the need to be tough –as Marion called it: “arseholeness.” In a way it seemed as if Marion experienced herself as being exposed to an “enemy world” and her only choice was to accept the challenges and hardships without any chance to control them.

The situation became even more difficult as Marion had no concept of her own future. There was no partner and no idea of how such a person should be or act, no realistic personal project. Her decision to pursue the retailer traineeship only served as a shield against unemployment, but did not meet her interests and (personally anticipated) competences; it just had been the pragmatic ending point after frustrating attempts for a better job/traineeship.

Marion’s story provided the image of an adolescent who gave up her aspirations without sufficient time to think about her own wishes and their possible realization. Consequently she suspended her wishes in a vague and far away future. Asked if she had “a future idea or image” of herself, she responded that she wished to become a person with “an own opinion and identity,” accompanied by two further elaborations: “once to be married” and “to have some kind of job I am really interested in.” Further definitions of adulthood according to Marion:

You’re adult with about 28 (she laughs). Yes, probably to have your own real existence, yeah, to work, to really earn money [. . .] and yes, maybe, to be grounded in your own life and tasks. Something like this, I think.

She also mentioned “to get clear” about herself, to gain “self-assurance” or “inner unity.” Using such concepts Marion obviously tended to idealize adulthood as a state of “maturity.” But she did not provide any details of *how* she expected to reach this state.

With the numerous facets revealed in the first interview with Marion, the picture of a young woman emerged, to her the own development –where she came from, the “how” of being an adolescent and of becoming an adult– was based on compromises. Marion passively accepted the “fate” of getting older and its affordances. During her narrative she seemed to be partly invisible against the overwhelming dominance of others (for example, forced by her parents and her mother’s partner to accept a job she did not want), and she acted loyally against other’s interests and orders, she tried to fulfill and justify them. So she stayed with her mother after her parents’ divorce, although she disliked

it, because “it was reasonable to keep the family together as far as possible.” She then took a basement flat –and made it her “hut,” while her younger sister lived in her mother’s apartment.

The extent to which Marion’s story can be reconstructed as an attempt to reach *her* idea of adulthood by loyalty and subordination I would like to analyze a sequence about a stay in the USA. Marion worked as an au-pair and felt very “lonesome” and thought about leaving the host family (and probably also the country) early:

- M: But than my host mother fall ill
 I2: hmm
 M: and stayed home for about two, three weeks, eh, did not work and so we started to come in contact with each other. Well, this was about Christmas time. After Christmas she again started to work, but eh, I were not sure at that time if I should stay or leave. [. . .]
 I1: Are you still in contact [. . .]?
 M: After I returned [to Berlin] there had been no contact with my host family at all. (difficult to follow) this was really hard! Goodbye at the airport with tears and oh we will miss you and you are really important for us, and then . . . nothing.

This is the sequence as reported in the interview, now my interpretation. As her idea of leaving the host family coincided with the illness of the host mother, Marion decided to stay because she felt uncomfortable leaving the family in this situation. This again points to Marion’s loyalty, her tendency to repress her own interests. But the main point, in my opinion, is another one: during this passage Marion stopped her rather controlled way of narrating and responded very excitedly and outraged; despite the “warm goodbye” and the tears at the airport afterwards there was no contact any more: *this* is what disappointed her. She obviously felt cheated as her efforts did not bear fruits, and the intensity of her emotional response is rather different from the calm and controlled way she described other difficult events (especially her parent’s divorce and her partner leaving her). One possibility might be to think about a kind of emotional shift: the feelings and the involvement she was not able (and not allowed) to express at the “correct” place were linked (narratively and emotionally) to the seemingly more harmless scene with the host family. But if one takes into account that Marion’s loyalty in a way served as the only anticipated and accepted strategy to fulfill her needs unobtrusively, the narrative takes on additional meaning: Marion’s fear that loyalty would not sell, that making sacrifices would not necessarily lead to the reward she hoped for in the long run. And *this* would endanger her complete model of life, because hiding/giving up her wishes (for example her choice of profession), her obedience to her family (being the “cellar child”), all this is subordinated to one main aim: Marion’s idea of a clearly defined life plan. Becoming an adult at the age of 28, gaining “self-assurance” and “inner unity,” in some ways reminds of Erikson and his notion that the end of

the moratorium adolescence is defined by integrity and by being socially accepted –and as the above story indicates, this aim might have been threatened.

The second interview

By the time of the second interview (one year after the first) Marion was living in a small apartment of her own. She had good prospects of receiving a regular contract (and of gaining financial independence), after finishing her final examination. Marion’s social life also improved: she had a boyfriend and a significant female friend at her vocational college.

In a way the complete second interview follows one main motif: she *is* now the active planer and “producer” of her own development as she wished to be during the first interview. Interestingly, Marion now tells her story as if she had been this active person her entire life, and as if she never accepted others’ rules. Even her choice of profession was, as she described it, *her* personal decision; that she once wished to study biology education is not even mentioned during the second interview. Also different from the first interview, she now says that she accepts and appreciates vagueness and unexpectedness as a necessary part of life instead of the “clear” life plan without any surprises. At the time of the first interview, Marion felt threatened by surprises. Finally, Marion’s way of narration changed: While during the first interview she followed the communicative input from the interviewers (also in this respect she once acted “well-behaved”); in the second interview she is rather active, partly dominating the situation and sometimes responding “pertly” to the interviewer’s questions.

5.3 Discussion

After offering some interpretation from the case study I now would like to discuss *possible generalizations*. In my opinion the story of Marion illustrates a partly complicated transition from adolescence to adulthood. In some ways in the case of Marion a more consistent concept of self would not have been possible (because of youth unemployment or of integrating family and profession as a still primarily female developmental task). Therefore, Marion’s story –and also the stories of the other interviewees– is about (self) contradictions adolescents have to face. But the interviews also show that even if self and world concepts and experiences are crisis-prone, the adolescents find ways to establish a feeling of unity and uniqueness, even if temporary.

How do adolescents maintain such feelings of unity and uniqueness? Each interview followed its own (narrative) main logic –a kind of “great biographical story.” This is what I tried to illustrate using Marion’s case study. While during the first interview Marion continually tried to be “invisible,” during the second interview she became an active and self-confident “advocate” of her own interests. And as each story deals with consistency in conflict with one another,

Marion in the second interview gives the impression as if the first interview never happened, or as if aspects seemingly discrepant between the first and second narration had always been “on the way” according to the main logic presented the second interview. This also includes recognizing and explaining differences: Marion emphasized that during the time of the first interview she preferred to fulfill her own wishes as inconspicuously as possible, while she imagined that in the next interview she probably would report on her “heroic deeds.”

Although the self presentations seem to be different at first glance, there are shared dimensions which played a crucial role during both interviews: in Marion’s case study autonomy vs. heteronomy, inclusion/acknowledgement vs. exclusion/isolation, and activity vs. passivity. These dimensions are stable, the differences in the narration occur while adolescents move between the poles of the respective dimension. And this move defines which part of a (his)story is considered at a time and in what way. This allows us to understand why Marion during the second interview did not mention her plan to leave the American host family; the negative connotation from the first interview was completely missing. Rather, during the second interview Marion exposes more detailed reasons for the decision to visit America and mentions people who told her after she returned to Germany that she had won self-confidence. It would have been possible to mention this also in the first interview (two years after the visit to America), but it did not fit the pole of the story Marion (re)constructed and experienced at that time.

5.4 Methodological background and methods used

I have attempted to demonstrate empirically how an individual (Marion) attempts to keep a “relative entirety” despite heterogeneity. I now will provide some methodological and methodical comments.

There were four main reasons why I chose a qualitative-empirical approach:

- The design would allow me to explore subjective meaning and to generate theory from the data.
- Qualitative research methods help to reconstruct personal life plans and interpretation patterns as well as their dependency on socio-cultural life worlds.
- Standardized questionnaires often used in traditional identity research do not allow for thorough analyses of identity construction processes because they define and measure self narration over time and for different dimensions with more stability than they occur in psychosocial realities.
- Analyzing the narrative construction of adolescent identity development requires an approach that allows the exploration of the

micro-narration, -presentation, and -construction logics of adolescents’ stories.

Qualitative research

Doing qualitative research does not mean one is using so called “soft” methods. The qualitative approach is a way of doing research that leads one to a deep understanding of perceiving, describing, and interpreting reality. Among the central principles of qualitative research are a focus on single cases and a holistic stance. In accordance with Christa Hoffmann-Riem (1980), I would like to emphasize two especially important characteristics of qualitative research: the “principle of openness” and the “principle of communication.”

According to the “principle of openness” research participants should have the opportunity to actively structure the research situation (interview) rather than be dominated by the (theoretical) pre-assumptions of the researchers. This should allow for the exploration of the various manifestations of identity: Overall ascriptions such as “identity diffusion,” (Marcia, 1989) “patchwork identity” (Kraus, 2000) should be used very carefully as they may lead the researcher to ignore the biographical continuity from the participant’s perspective. In contrast, generalizations about coherence and continuity as central ingredients of identity should be avoided, because they may lead the researcher to ignore incongruence and contradictions.

The “principle of communication” is probably a characteristic that most prominently differentiates qualitative and quantitative research. This principle acknowledges the interaction between researchers and research participants as the constitutive element of understanding: *any* (“aroused”) responses and utterances that occur need to be analyzed as co-constructions of the persons involved in the interview situation.

In the case of Marion the principle of communication played a crucial role in the interview and its subsequent interpretation, as she was interviewed by two women, one 32 years old, the other 35 years old. This design unintentionally led to a kind of re-producing, as only very little information about Marion had been available, because in some regards Marion’s behaviour towards the two interviewers had important similarities to her behaviour towards her mother and her mother’s female partner. Therefore the analysis of the interview situation helps us understand the way Marion tended to “act loyal.” She was well-behaved during the interview as she did with her complete obedience narration. It therefore is not only important to include in the analysis *what* an interviewee says but also *how* she acts toward the concrete other, how she does not use the potentials offered by an open interview design.

Data collection

The problem-centered interview. I decided to use the problem-centered interview (Witzel, 2000) because it relies on important commonalities with qualitative research (especially the principles of openness and communication) by using different question forms. Witzel differentiates “general exploration” and “specific explorations,” from “mirroring,” with “clarifying questions” and “confrontations” belonging to the latter.

In my opinion the problem-centered interview is better suited for research than are semi-structured interviews (like the identity status interview, see Marcia, 1966) because of its dialogic-discursive character. Interviewees have a chance to play an active role (if they choose it), while interviewers at the same time have the freedom to discuss possible contradictions and ambivalences with the interviewees. Interviewees are acknowledged as experts and theorists, and their history and interests are recognized. Consequently, communicative validation is made possible in the interview situation.

Interview schedule. Deciding to concentrate on a particular age group also means having to decide on the foci: currently no identity research per se is being done (see the different versions of the identity status interview for early/late adolescence and adulthood by Marcia et al., 1993, Appendices A, B and C). The particular age group being focused on needs to be kept in mind while selecting research instruments. In the case of the problem-centered interview the interview schedule needs to be defined according to the research focus. In the interview schedule for my research the following topics were included: family, peers, partners, school/work, leisure time, gender, ego-self-body, values, future (see figure 1, Mey, 1999, pp.152ff for the complete schedule with detailed comments):

Table 5.1

Interview schedule (Mey, 1999, p.152)

Opening question	“You are now xx years old. Please try to look back on your life. And please tell us –as detailed as you like– how you experienced not being a child any longer and how the story continued from that point on.”
Family	Familial constellation ([step-]brothers/sisters, [step-]parents, grandparents etc.); different relations to family members; education style; processes of exchange in the family and concrete ways to deal with personal problems and conflicts (also conflict causes); model function of the family members
Friendships	Definition of friendship; concrete descriptions of relations to friends; experiences with and expectation towards “real good” friends; controversies and conflicts with (female/male) friends

Table 5.1 continued

Love relations	(Sexual) relations in the past and present; activities shared with a partner; imagines o. “long-term” relations and partnership; expectation toward partnership (individual norms/concepts); reflection on starting and maintaining partnership (concepts of “being in time”/different stages)
School/job/work	General view on personal school/job situation; (self) construction of being a student/worker; relation to teachers/superiors and bosses/school fellows/colleagues; self evaluation of motifs for choice of/performance at school/vocational career
Leisure time	Activities; interests/hobbies; time budget (typical everyday); financial situation
Gender/sex (roles)	Concept of being a man/a woman; sex/gender stereotypes; sex and work; sex and partnership; ideas of sharing tasks (family, household and work) in a future life plan
Concept of youth and adulthood	Self concept and self image of being an adolescent; definition of and criteria for child/childhood, adolescence/adolescent, adult/adulthood
Ego-self-body	Self image and ideas of the way self is perceived by others; relevance of the body/body action (sport; drugs); wishes/activities to body change; causes for and ways of self reflection
Values/moral development	Moral, religious and political attitudes; ideology; life principle(s)
Future	Near/distant vocational/private future (partnership; children; concept of an own family life; ideas of balancing family and job; career choice/aspiration); concepts of future; life goals (the future in 20 years)
Ending question (sum up reflection)	“If your life would be the subject to a movie: what, in your opinion, would be necessary to receive an accurate portrayal?”
Interview closing questions	Aspects of the interviewee missed during the interview; experience of the interview (like/dislike etc.)

In identity research it is assumed that there are different dominant “logics” for different areas of life:

- Different areas of life may be differently important for the adolescents’ identity development.
- There may be conflicts between such areas, which possibly make the processes of identity development more difficult.

- Adolescents may use different “subject positions” for different areas of life; this means that experiencing (and describing) oneself to be active vs. passive may change between these areas.

The importance of different areas and the interplay between them was also obvious in the case of Marion: While she described becoming a girl scout (area of leisure time) Marion mentioned that a girlfriend introduced her to the scouts and she “just stayed” after the girlfriend left the group. This reminds us of the passive self Marion chooses time and again. She draws a picture of herself as a person who accepted (and in a way learned to love) what was left within the well-defined frames others provided (e.g. the basement flat assigned to her became her “hut”). But: The scout story reads in some ways differently from Marion’s choice of profession story, because she resisted her mother’s and her mother’s partner’s pressure to leave the scouts because of her age while she accepted their influence on her professional development.

Beginning and ending an interview. Beginning and ending an interview requires special attention, as both serve as “frames” for the interview, which –according to the principle of openness– are subject to the interviewee’s structuring competences.

In the case of my research the *opening question* was: “You are now xx years old. Please try to look back on your life. And please tell us –as detailed as you like– how you experienced not being a child any longer and how the story continued from that point on.”

The question is intended to invite adolescents to provide their own view on their lives, to act as auto-biographers. But the narrative opening in some cases did not work. For example, Marion did not produce a detailed narration. Nevertheless the way she responded helped to understand *her* story; it gave interesting insights in *her* way of being a biographer of *her* own history.

Marion considered the start of the high school and being assigned her own room to be markers for the end of her childhood. Then she stopped, and after the interviewers explicitly encouraged her again just to tell *her* story she delivered a formal curriculum vitae, always mentioning the respective class she visited and some “important events”: her parents’ divorce, becoming a girl scout, the two love affairs, her travel to America.

Her response shows the extent to which Marion during the first interview was delivered from a school (class) perspective and helped to understand the importance of school as structuring life frame at that time. The formal chronology she provided (“and then [. . .] and then”) indicated developmental processes, but she obviously did not experience herself as an active producer of the own development. So in a way she *was not* her own biographer or, more accurately, it was not her *own* biography she talked about. Linking her response to the opening question to of her story provided above, one might say that her “and then” culminated in her definition of adulthood: to achieve “an own opinion and iden-

tity” more or less automatically as a natural ending point of the chronology: “And then one is adult.” So the internal dramaturgy of Marion’s story was already present at the beginning of the interview.

As all interviews typically begin with a similar opening question, they also end with one final question, that should help to reflect on the main topics mentioned during the interview, and to provide a kind of final personal summary. The adolescents were asked to imagine the following: “If your life would be the subject to a movie: what, in your opinion, would be necessary to receive an accurate portrayal?”

Also, the responses to this question provided very precious insights, and this, similar to the opening question, even if the question did not work at a first glance. “I would not allow such a movie,” Marion said at the end of the first interview, because she anticipated a curious and obtrusive public penetrating in the private life of sport stars and actors. Then she added, obviously trying to fulfil her interviewee task, she would like:

to achieve something in my life, writing a book or so if nothing else works, but surely not, yeah, but surely trying to receive acknowledgment in a more invisible way, not by a movie or something splendid, but in a way [. . .] Yes, to win impact over other’s life without being visible. This is why I would dislike such a movie, cause you suddenly would be in the center of the scene and, don’t know you would become completely fragmented.

In this response Marion provides some central topics already mentioned above. She disliked the exploratory character of this question; Marion did not accept any surprises at this time. And she helped lend some understanding to the purposes of being loyal and obedient; it helps to avoid becoming visible, touchable, and open to attack.

Transcription

The interpretation mainly relies on the written interview transcripts (audio tapes are used when deemed necessary), so it is important to decide how detailed transcriptions need to be (see Kowal & O’Connell, 2004), how the verbal content and its expression (pitch, loudness) should be handled as well as non-verbal characteristics, accompanying the narration (e.g. clearing one’s throat, laughter, but also mimicking and other non-verbal gestures). And it also must be decided if the entire interview should be transcribed or only extracts, and which ones.

In my study I decided to employ literary transcription as opposed to a more detailed “eye dialect” or phonetic transcription, which are especially useful in the case of linguistic/conversation analyses. In this study the complete interviews were transcribed. For sure in the case of Marion it would have been possible to use summaries for her partly very long explanations why generally, and in her own case, it would have not been reasonable to study biology education,

her “dream job.” But this would have meant neglecting Marion’s way of using public arguments to hide her personal reasons and sentiments; namely, her disappointment that her parents were not willing to pay. Additionally, the contrast between such very detailed passages and other parts of the interview which also needed explication but did not receive it would have been lost. Summarizing instead of transcribing would have risked losing important insights because the decision to omit passages would follow the manifest content and ignore the communicative and latent structure of such passages.

Analysis

For examining the data I developed a frame for analysis combining grounded theory methodology (GTM): the original variants of Glaser & Strauss (1967), Strauss (1987) and Strauss & Corbin (1990) and an adaptation of GTM, “Global Analysis” (Legewie, 1994) and the “Method of Circular Deconstruction” (Jaeggi, Fass, & Mruck, 1998) as well as selected rules from objective hermeneutics (as modified with links to biographical research and analysing narratives by Rosenthal (1993). (For a detailed description of methods of analyses of developmental processes see Mey, 2003, 1999, chap. IV.2.2.):

- First, I began with a global *getting into contact* with the interview and with *reflecting first on emotional reactions* to the data;
- secondly, emerging interpretations were *unfolded and systematized*;
- finally, the core interpretations for each single case were *condensed and evaluated*.

It is necessary to stress again that qualitative research, according to the “principle of communication,” requires the researcher to reflect on his or her subjectivity during the whole process of collecting and analyzing data. That researchers respond emotionally to a person or a text is a *condition sine qua non*, and so is the reflection on researchers’ subjectivity for an adequate understanding of all data. One consequence is that the complete research process, from posing a research question to the formulation of a grounded theory, needs to be done by a research team. If this is not possible at least the data analysis should be conducted by a team (see Mruck & Mey, 1998, for theoretical considerations and suggestions for how to organize interpretation groups).

Step 1: Getting into global contact and reflecting on first emotional reactions to the data. This first step serves to focus on the first ideas of the research participant and his or her history and way of self presentation. This means:

- getting familiar with the data,
- receiving a first overview of the interview, and
- allowing a first emotional response and reflection.

During this first step more principled questions are asked concerning the complete text: “What is going on here?” It may be helpful during this first getting in contact to condense what seems to be central into a kind of “motto” which serves as a global summary for the first line of interpretation.

The first interview with Marion was given the following motto (after several mottos had been discussed by the research team): “I really would love to be a girl scout also in the future.” The motto for the second interview was: “Really don’t know what heroic stories I may tell in the future [. . .].” The process of deciding on a motto by the research group helps to simultaneously create a dense and colourful picture for each interview. As this creative act is useful to generate first interpretations, for the following analysis it should not be given up for a more detailed and systematic analysis of concrete passages too early. This is because the reflection of the first emotional responses (e.g. sympathy, antipathy, compassion) often is helpful for the second systematic approach by asking for example “Why do you suffer with Marion?” “What makes you think of Marion as a weak person?” “In which way does Marion remind you of your own adolescence?”

Step 2: Unfolding and systematizing emerging interpretations. This second step aims at analyzing single transcribed passages word-by-word or sequence-by-sequence. During this first interpretation, available from Step 1, are successively revised, unfolded, or given up completely if they do not fit the data during the ongoing analyses.

During this phase the overt structure of the content is explored analytically by using questions to the phenomenon being examined. This step is rather well known from different qualitative methods (e.g., “open coding” in the case of GTM, “sequential analysis” in the case of objective hermeneutics, or “detailed analysis” in the case of narration analytical approaches).

According to GTM (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) the so called “paradigmatic model” may be used while coding: it asks for causes, conditions, context, interaction, phenomenon, strategies, and consequences, using questions like:

- *what* –what is the phenomenon the sequence/text deals with;
- *who* –who participates, which roles are used/ascribed;
- *in which way* –which aspects are elaborated (and which are ignored);
- *at what time, how long, where* –which role the place and time play in the narration (biographically, for a single act/sequence);
- *why* –which causes/arguments are provided (in)directly;
- *how* –which strategies are used;
- *to which purpose* –which consequences were experienced/anticipated.

Some of the interpretations mentioned in the case study above only make sense with such questions in mind. To mention just the most important interpretations: The challenging situation after high school (condition), the parents’

pressure (context), Marion’s being passive and her tendency to suspend own wishes and interests (strategies), and her hope that adulthood will “occur” at the end of the development (anticipated consequence).

To respond to the theory generating questions the background knowledge of the researchers should be used. Most times these questions receive two answers: one refers to the overt meaning (as provided during the narration), the other relates to (latent) meaning/the researchers’ interpretation (this difference was crucial for the various interpretations of the American sequence).

As not all interviews could be exposed to open coding completely (in my research there had been roughly 150-200 pages per interview) it is necessary to account theoretically for the decision which sequences had been selected:

- Often the opening sequence of an interview gains special attention. In my case this was because of the importance of the opening question for my research. More generally in the beginning of an interview the interaction between researcher and research participant is established, and many peculiarities important for the complete interview are already visible in this opening sequence.
- Sequences should be considered for open coding which deal in a central way with the phenomenon under research: In my study this had been the movie question, dealing with the adolescents’ self perception and the way they believe they are to be experienced by others, and the question concerning their anticipation of the future.
- Those sequences should be interpreted more closely that cause special emotional responses or which at a first glance seem to be especially closed to interpretations. In the case of Marion her description of her visit to America was very emotional, which was very different from her narration during the rest of the interview.

Step 3: Condensation and evaluation of core interpretations. After systematizing the interpretations during detailed sequence analysis like those described above which are dedicated to generating a single case theory, all of the dimensions (categories) elaborated through the earlier steps are carefully evaluated, condensed, and revised, comparable to axial coding in GTM (via Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This is done by using sequences that directly indicate the phenomenon under research, in the case of Marion passages dealing with her obedience, etc. Additionally, sequences are included in the analysis which are linked to the phenomenon indirectly, for example the scout story which in a way contradicts all other sequences.

A single case analysis is finished after a “story” has been generated (comparable to selective coding in GTM; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), explaining consistently and systematically what is going on in this single case. It is important at this stage to ask if the complete data follow the major line of interpretation de-

veloped during the complete process of data analysis. This is what I tried to do with my case study. Furthermore, using this structure for my article I tried to give the reader an idea of the procedures I used to evaluate such major lines of interpretation.

5.5 Final remarks

The psychological developmental study of identity especially benefits from a qualitative approach and from employing and combining qualitative methods creatively.

In this study I attempted to demonstrate this with the single case presented in this article. My effort stands in a way as an example of the initial acceptance of qualitative methods within developmental psychology (see Mey, 2000, 2003; and more detailed, 2005); additionally, it illustrates some of the difficulties accompanying qualitative research and its presentation in publications. Related to the still difficult role of theory within qualitative research this especially concerns transparency of methods and interpretations on the one hand and the use of accepted qualitative “labels” on the other.

To report results from qualitative inquiry in research articles is difficult because of page restrictions that work against the need to provide detailed information about data and data analysis. In the case of Marion I did the analysis without extensive citations; I also omitted the description of more subtle interpretations. So in some regards readers are forced to trust instead of learning from a successive (and detailed) exposition of data and interpretation –that I tried to provide the case study to step by step give insight in my use of methods and in the interpretations I developed did probably only help partly. Interesting solutions to such a dilemma arise from online publications because there are less page restrictions and data (e.g., interviews) can be provided using a hyper text structure (I tried to realize this at least partly for a multi media text module for the FernUniversität Hagen in Germany, see Mey, 2004).

A second problem arises from the methods used for “making identities talk” (Kraus, 2000), and, more precisely, from the reputation methods acquire. Also, in qualitative research to mention special acknowledged methods is important as an act of authorization. Currently there is a growing number of German publications, using, for example, “problem-centered interviews” or “grounded theory” as a kind of label to prove that accepted routines had been used and in this way try to increase the dignity of the research. But just using labels is not sufficient for high quality qualitative research: *Application of qualitative methods* always means *developing* qualitative methods, and this requires presenting methods use and the interpretations done rather transparently. In this article I have attempted to show at least in a limited way that this may bring benefits.

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